



# Report notes high risk at contaminated S. Plainfield site

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STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Contamination at the former Cornell-Dubilier complex in South Plainfield is so high that outdoor workers and "trespassers" face a high risk of cancer from repeated exposure, according to a study for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The report by EPA consultants Foster Wheeler found 28 chemicals that are "significant contributors" to health hazards on the 26-acre property in the center of the borough. Polychlorinated biphenyls, a coolant used in electrical equipment, are pervasive throughout the site, the report found. PCBs are a likely carcinogen and are also implicated in development disabilities.

The spread of PCBs into ground and surface water makes contamination in and around the former electronics plant "unique" in the nation, said John Prince, chief of EPA's remediation section for Central New Jersey. The EPA added the site to the national Superfund list in 1998.

Beginning in 1997, the agency has cleaned up "hot spots" and paved over other portions of the property, as well as removing contaminated soil and dust from 13

nearby houses. The owners fenced off the rear of the property along the Bound Brook and a tributary stream to keep people off land historically used as a dump.

But the Foster Wheeler study found that future construction workers, outdoor workers and people repeatedly trespassing on the fenced off area all face potential health hazards. The report said that chronic exposure to contaminants on the site would produce three cancers cases per 100 people, compared to an allowable risk of one in a million.

Considering how toxic the site is, local environmentalists say the pace of the cleanup is moving too slowly.

"This site is an environmental disaster area," said Robert Spiegel, executive director of the Edison Wetlands Association. "This should be such a high priority that they are out there right now, cleaning it up. Instead, they're talking five, 10, 20 years."

At a 7 p.m. meeting tomorrow at borough hall, EPA officials will explain plans to excavate contaminated soil from three nearby properties and do additional tests on 59 other properties in the surrounding neighborhood.

Borough officials hope to move ahead with redevelopment plans,



A sign on the Cornell-Dubilier Superfund site in South Plainfield warns people of hazardous material. A recent report found 28 chemicals that are "significant contributors" to health hazards on the property.

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said Council President James Vokral. The council designated the site as a redevelopment zone two years ago, and the latest concept calls for three office buildings, with stores in front, he said. A speedy cleanup will be key to starting the project in two to three years, Vokral said.

The council's move has helped

spur plans for an overall cleanup of the area, Prince said. But the agency, which has spent \$3 million so far on Cornell-Dubilier, wanted to be sure the borough agrees to a remediation plan.

A "back of the envelope" estimate puts the cost of a comprehensive cleanup of soil and water

pollution on the former electronics plant property at \$130 million to \$140 million, Prince said.

Another alternative, "capping the site and 'managing' the pollution that's there," might run \$30 million to \$40 million, Prince said. An estimated 300,000 cubic yards of

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soil are contaminated, 50 percent more than the Chemical Insecticide Corp. site in Edison, where excavation is scheduled to begin next month, he said.

While parts of the property are extremely polluted, other portions of the site are home to numerous active businesses.

Environmental agencies say contamination is at safe levels in buildings currently occupied by trucking, contracting, shipping and merchandising firms.

"I think if you're working there, you know to stay in the parking lot and not go wandering off," said EPA spokeswoman Elizabeth Zimmerman.

"The operators who are on the site right now are well aware of the problem," said Ken Petrone, a section chief for the state Department of Environmental Protection.

But Evan Dana, who owns Horizon Sales with his three brothers, said they "didn't know a thing" about the pollution before signing a five-year lease at the site earlier this year.

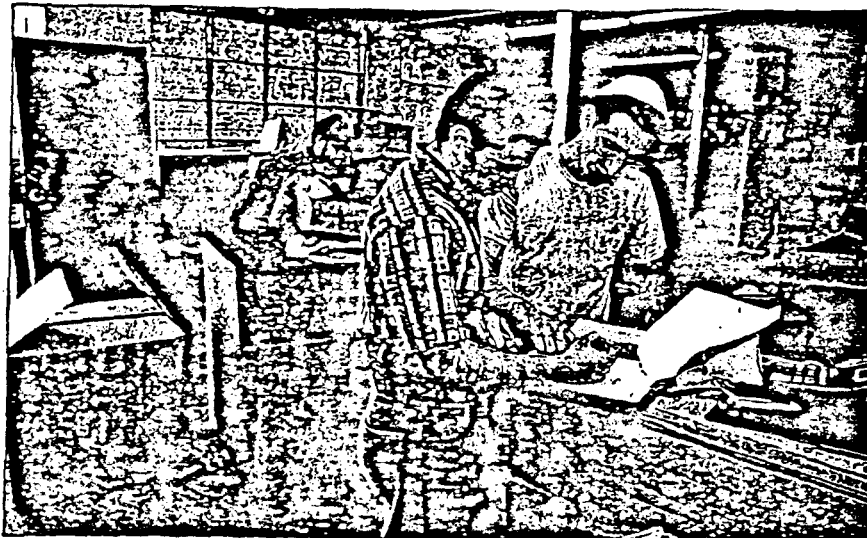
Setting up an office in an old brick warehouse, he said they learned of the pollution "when we walked out back and saw the signs" warning "Hazardous Waste Site Danger" in overgrown grass plots by some other buildings.

Marco Massa and Robert Sullivan moved their mailing business into another building in the complex in August.

"It's an old complex and I was looking for a place to start up a business," Massa said, adding landlord DSC of Newark Enterprises Inc. "didn't tell us anything." Now, they are looking for a new location.

"People are very concerned about the runoff from all around us," Massa said.

A DSC representative requested questions in writing but



The Dana brothers, Evan, background, David, center, and Joseph work in their Horizon Sales business on the Cornell-Dublier Superfund site in South Plainfield last week.

did not immediately respond with answers last week.

PCBs are normally stable in soil and do not mix with water, but because there are so many chemical solvents in the soil at Cornell-Dublier, the PCBs have dissolved and gotten into the water, said Petrone.

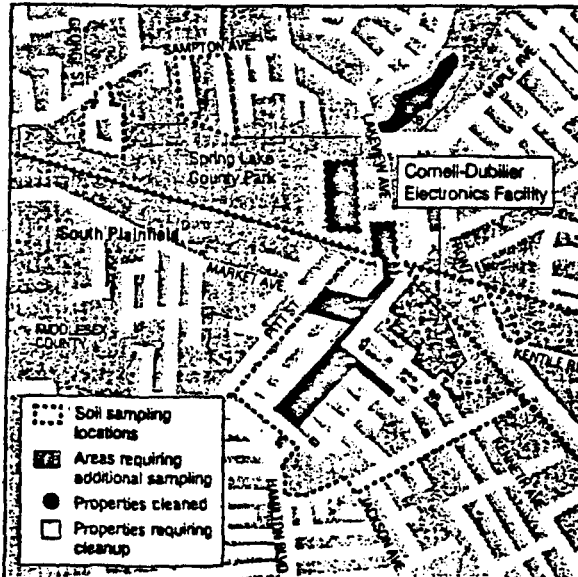
The PCBs are pervasive in the soil, affecting 74 percent of the property, according to the Foster Wheeler study.

In contrast with a federal PCB screening standard of 49 part per million, samples from the South Plainfield site showed levels as high as 1.3 parts per 10.

"Having a site with 50 or 100 ppm is unacceptable," Prince said. "This is a site where there are many, many places where levels are tens of thousands above what's acceptable."

Some of the contaminants have been found on properties in the surrounding neighborhood.

The EPA now plans to take soil samples from properties as far away as six blocks from the plant, which is bounded by Hamilton Boulevard and Spicer Avenue. It will also take soil samples near Borough Park on the other side of the Lehigh Valley Rail line.



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Vokral, the council president, said residents don't seem too concerned about the Superfund site.

"We have not heard a lot from the local people," he said. "They're pretty happy, pretty satisfied with what is going on."

Neighbor Bill Hogan, a borough native, is an exception.

"Nobody's moving very fast on this thing," he said. "Now, what they're trying to do is give everybody a pie-in-the-sky presentation" on redevelopment, "and say, 'forget about the contamination.'"

But others echoed Jayne Wickham, who bought a home just down the street from Hogan two years ago.

"I'm not concerned," she said. The seller had to disclose the cleanup, she said, "but I had an inspector and he didn't say it was a problem. He didn't say, 'don't buy it.'"

Earlier investigations documented runoff into the Bound Brook, and "no fishing" signs were posted along the stream and a local tributary. But over the years, many of the signs have been taken down, according to local residents.

"There are people who are fishing in New Market Pond and eating fish with the highest levels of PCBs in New Jersey," Spiegel said.

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